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ABSTRACT

The principal's main role must be that of a change agent who is attempting to improve instruction by improving teaching, and the best way to improve teaching is to change teacher behavior. This improvement is possible only through changes in the instructional pattern of the teacher. Some methods of procedure and discussion of leadership patterns are offered. (Author/MLF)

Good Morning:

March 5, 1974

"Principal: Teacher of Teachers"

by Richard A. Dols

Our area of interest has a title that could probably stand some clarification. At first glance we are all quite sure that we know exactly what is meant by the statement "Teacher of Teachers." We all know that historically the principal of any school was selected on the basis of being supposedly, a master teacher. With the original one teacher school house, no problem, with two teachers, a need for cooperation, however, as schools became larger, more organization and planning was needed, supplies had to be purchased, someone had to assume responsibility for all the myraid of details now confronting the school. One teacher was selected as the master or principal teacher. Usually this teacher still continued full time in the classroom and also handled all of the administrative details whenever possible. The teaching principal concept is still with us in many areas of the United States but fortunately, is a fading position, as more and more small schools and small districts are consolidated. However, as schools became larger with more teachers, more students, more rooms and many various other aspects of education, the principalship became more time demanding and time consuming. It was necessary to move the principal out of the classroom and give him the time and the training to become an effective and efficient principal.

When I received my first principal's certificate in Minnesota in 1953, all that was needed to qualify, was two years classroom experience in the public schools, a B.S. or B.A. degree, and nine additional graduate credits in the field of school administration. I was then a qualified administrator, but most of my experience and training was still applicable to the classroom. This has changed drastically, almost all states now require at least a M.A. degree or the equivalent, with a majority of the credits required in the field of educational administration. We are still very much concerned with instruction but we also have other items to concern ourselves with; budgeting, scheduling, supplies, teacher evaluation, and negotiations, as well as facilities, student behavior and activities, parents, transportation, and on and on. The master teacher has now

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become the master administrator with daily pressures from every direction concerning the operation of the school. Let's now turn ourselves back to the teacher of teachers concept.

The question, Do we need a teacher of teachers?, will be answered as we move along. My own thoughts, if we answer yes, are along the lines of, teacher of what? Do we teach course content, methods, procedures -- exactly what are we to teach? Let's take a look at a dictionary for further enlightenment. Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary says, "teacher: one that teaches esp: one whose occupation is to instruct." Webster's has this to say about teaching: "teach: to show, instruct -- to cause to know a subject -- to cause to know how -- to accustom to some action or attitude -- to make to know the disagreeable consequences of some action -- to guide the studies of -- to impart the knowledge of -- to instruct by precept, example or experience -- to seek to make known and accepted, to provide instruction, act as a teacher." ----- Webster has much more to say but I will leave the balance for you to refer to, if you are so inclined. We've determined, at least according to Webster, what a teacher is and what he is supposed to do as a teacher. Let me focus on one aspect of the definition of teach, "to accustom to some action or attitude" -- I would maintain that the purpose of, and your role as a teacher of teachers is simply, to change behavior for the improvement of instruction. Therein really lies the tale, we could all write a job description or list of duties for the principal, which would be very much alike. There would be differences, as would be expected, but I'm quite sure every list would include some statement that would refer to the "improvement of instruction." This then, is the area that I wish to address myself too, and the question that needs to be answered now that we have determined that the what is really, "how."

It would then appear that our role must be that of a change agent who is attempting to improve instruction by improving teaching, and the best way to improve teaching, is to change teacher behavior. We have spent a great deal of time and money in new forms of organization, building remodeling, new hardware, new software, books, theories and

methods, all designed to improve learning, but we have tended to forget that the use of these implies some change in teacher behavior; without that change, instruction cannot do any better than it already has. This is not to imply that we need to accept or use every new idea that appears, we still have a multitude of very good methods and procedures, in operation now that are very effective and will continue to be so. There is a time and place for such things as rote drill, memorization, and good study and work skills. All changes are not necessarily followed by instant success, but we must remember we are talking about a change for improvement and if that change does not improve, then another change is necessary to improve on that one. If instruction is to improve it must change. We must be sure that our changes are backed by data that represents a reasonable degree of success. Eventually, the change will sooner or later result in an improvement in instruction. In a study by Walter Foster,<sup>1</sup> 213 experienced teachers were asked if they were teaching as well as they knew how, all admitted that they were not. 205 of the 213 also placed part of the blame on themselves. Eight reasons that 10% or more gave for their failure are as follows:

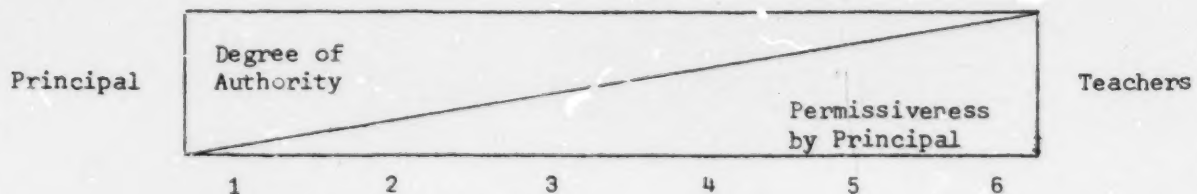
|                                                           |      |   |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|------|---|
| Insufficient time spent in planning and preparing         | 38   | % |
| Insufficient teacher-pupil planning                       | 25.4 |   |
| Fatigue and lack of energy                                | 24.9 |   |
| Insufficient grouping for instruction                     | 19.5 |   |
| Lack of knowledge of subject matter                       | 12.7 |   |
| Demands of home life                                      | 12.2 |   |
| Failure to provide for individual differences             | 11.2 |   |
| Insufficient time spent in working with individual pupils | 10.7 |   |

Each one of these self-admitted reasons can be identified as needing a change in teacher behavior in order to effect an improvement in instruction. It may well be that a quiz of this type could be a good first step to take. Your staff could then plan further action in determining their approaches to an improvement in instruction.

In any program that we become involved in, we usually look for a variety of methods

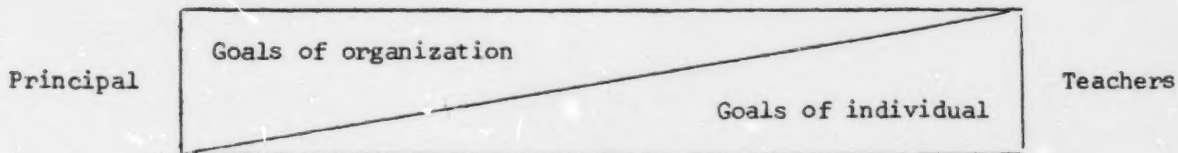
of reaching a goal. In our attempts to improve instruction it is up to us to determine which procedure best fits our own situation and move into it in a manner that will aid us in achieving success. What I am leading up to is the aspect of determining the type of leadership behavior which best fits the situation we are involved in. You are as knowledgeable as I about the hundreds of articles, books, research papers, talks, and experts all trying to tell us to don certain mantles of leadership forms in order to become effective. Most of these attempts in spite of the language and terms used tend to range from very strict to very permissive or authoritarian to democratic. For myself, I began as very authoritarian, then I began to experience difficult problems to resolve, and my decisions did not always turn out to be 100% correct. I began reading, studying other principals and their techniques, and finally spent a year at the University of Northern Colorado, which has a very fine educational administration department and began to see certain relationships about the principalship that were not so apparent before.

Tannebaum and Schmidt in their paper on "How to Choose a Leadership Pattern"<sup>2</sup> use the following in an attempt to provide some guidance to the problem of authoritarian vs democratic. Using this box, let's take a look at what it implies and how our decisions affect our role.



- Principal:
1. Makes decision - announces it
  2. Attempts to sell decision
  3. Makes decision - attempt to sell - subject to change
  4. Presents problems - gets suggestion - makes decision
  5. Defines limit - group makes decision
  6. Permits decision within limits as defined by box

You can see the range within which the principal is functioning. My belief is that he can function at any of these points, considering the circumstances and considering his willingness to assume the responsibilities and results of that position. Let me use the same box once again but let us place another pattern within it.



I believe it is quite obvious why we find the principal and the teachers at opposite ends. The principal, like it or not, is management or a representative of the organization, responsible for the achievement of the goals of the organization. The teacher is a member of the organization who functions within the organization but is not always striving to attain the same goals. The organization goals are not always identical, as witness teacher negotiations. It is up to the principal to determine his position in furthering the goals of the organization whenever he comes up against the goals of the individual. I am aware that many of these conflicts are settled via the "Master Agreement" but there still exists within every school the daily operations in which these confrontations exist. What are some of the things you can do to change or modify teacher behavior?

1. Attempt to develop a teacher willingness to accept supportive services. Try to get teachers to accept that these services are not a threat to their authority within the classroom, they are there to improve student learning and are available for the teacher to use in improving the classroom situation. For example, while a teacher may not approve of films -- research indicates that they have been a very effective teaching tool.
2. It is up to you to seek creative means for coordinating staff efforts -- often-times staff waits for someone to step up and coordinate a common goal. Who better than you? You are the one who is responsible for the well-being of the building and everything in it. You don't have to do it all, just get

staff together and get them started. Want something innovative going on in your building -- tell the staff you are interested and willing to back their efforts. That may be all it takes.

3. Provide stimuli for professional growth -- post nearby college courses, schedules, and activities; try to bring in outside expertise and knowledge; get professional library going; use your own staff for inservice and get their thoughts and ideas concerning what they want or need.
4. Familiarize teachers with innovations and make sure they can acquire the skills necessary for their effective use -- let your staff visit other schools and systems; write for information, suggest they attend workshops whenever possible, help them keep an open mind.
5. Teachers need motivation -- everyone needs some motivation to become active, teachers are no different, find means of applying this. It may be no more than a pat on the back, or an opportunity for leadership, give teachers a reason for getting involved and that is number 6.
6. Teachers need to become involved in what is going on around them, it is up to you to open the classroom doors and get things moving.

We've talked about authority and forms of leadership and means for placing leadership along a continuum. As listed above you have attempted to involve staff. What can you do personally?

1. Set a good example -- if you want others to improve start with yourself.
2. Foster cooperation with those striving to achieve the goals of the organization through interactions, use broad based decision making at the appropriate level
3. Minimize role conflict -- watch interpersonal relationships and conditions surrounding them.
4. Facilitate decision-making techniques
  - a. Identify the problem (not the conditions)
  - b. Define the problem (scope and implications)

- c. Consider all alternatives
  - d. Select one alternative and put into operation
  - e. Test and evaluate results
5. Permit trial and error but base next trial on previous error.
  6. Communication (face to face) should be frequent, concise, and professional (open).
  7. Use your influence where it will do the most good.
  8. When meeting resistance, determine why -- then deal with it creatively.
  9. Try to foresee additional problems and burdens -- alleviate wherever possible.
  10. Maintain quality while affecting change -- don't bite off more than you can chew -- provide back-up procedures where necessary.

Combs and Snygg<sup>3</sup> hold that the genius of good teaching lies in the ability to challenge students without threatening them and that the distinction between challenge and threat lies "not in what the teacher thinks he is doing, but in what the students perceive him to be doing." The paraphrase -- "the distinction between challenge and threat lies not in what the principal thinks he is doing, but in what the teachers perceive him to be doing."

Footnotes:

1. Foster, Walter S., "Teachers Perceptions of Their Teaching Practices and Means for Improving Their Instruction." Doctor's thesis. Eugene: University of Oregon, 1964. (Unpublished).
2. Tannenbaum, Robert and Schmidt, Warren. "How to Choose a Leadership Pattern." Department of Behavioral Science, University of California. p.3. (Unpublished mimeographed paper).
3. Combs, A., and Snygg, D. Individual Behavior. Evanston: Harper and Row, 1961.